

Albert B. Adams,
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OR, Corraling a Cunning Trio.

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AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSE-BUD ROB" NOVELS, "SIERRA SAM" NOVELS, ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGE LETTER.

THERE walked into the office of Inspector Byrnes, of New York, a man well known to our readers—no other than Richard Bristol, otherwise Deadwood Dick.

"Hello!" cried the inspector—"you back in New York again? Really, I never expected to see you again. What brings you here?"

DICK AND JOSIAH PAUSED TO GAZE AT HER. "MIGHTY FINE CRITTER, AIN'T SHE?" QUESTIONED THE LATTER.

"More detective work, I suspect. I have a letter from a young woman, which smacks of mystery, so I concluded to consult with you."

"Quite right. What is it you wish to know? Perhaps I will be able to supply the information you require at once."

"No doubt of it. Do you know of a family named Lester?"

"Do they live in New York?"

"That is more than I know."

"There may be a dozen families of that name."

"True. But read this letter," and Dick handed Mr. Byrnes a delicately perfumed missive.

It was in a woman's chirography, and ran as follows:

"NEW YORK, April —.

"MR. RICHARD M. BRISTOL:—

"DEAR SIR:—If you are not otherwise employed, on receipt of this, please come at once to New York, where most important and mysterious detective work awaits you, at a large compensation."

"The case is one that demands the attention of a man of cleverest skill as a detective, and such we have heard you are. Please do not fail to come, as a human life is in the balance."

"Yours truly,

"LOUISE LESTER."

The inspector read this over twice, and then stroked his glossy mustache.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Deadwood Dick.

"Nothing. If the writer had been so eager to obtain your services, why did she not send her address, instead of sending for you simply to come to this city? It's all a hoax, or else a scheme for some other villainous purpose."

"But the object?"

"I cannot say, as to that—revenge maybe."

Dick laughed.

"That's out of the question," he declared. "I am not aware that I have an enemy in New York."

"Perhaps not, but that does not signify that you haven't. Every detective or officer has enemies. I have plenty of them who would gladly cut my throat, if they dared, and I frequently receive threatening letters. Take my word for it, this Louise Lester is a humbug, or else, a rank skin."

Dick did not quite like this asseveration; so, after a few more words, he took leave of the inspector, and returned to the Morton House, where he was registered.

Here, securing a city Directory, he set about looking up the Lesters.

There were but comparatively few of that name, and were of course scattered over all sections of the city, one in Harlem, two in Yorkville, one in Sixth avenue, one at the Murray Hill Hotel, and several on the East side; but, no Louise Lester was on the lists. What Dick considered a possible clew, was the woman at the Murray Hill Hotel, who was down in the Directory simply as "Miss Lester."

If she could afford to live at a high-toned hostelry like the Murray Hill, she must have money—enough at least to employ a high-toned detective. Taking this into consideration, Dick resolved that she should be the first one he would interview; so, going to his room, he prepared his toilet as carefully as though he were going a-courting; then, ordering a cab, he was driven to the Murray Hill, where, finding by inquiry that the lady was in, he sent up his card.

The servant soon returned, announcing that the lady would see him, and Dick was conducted to a parlor on the third floor.

Here he found himself in the presence of a pretty but slender young girl of about sixteen—a girl with an intellectual cast of countenance and dark eyes and hair.

She was dressed in plain black, which gave her a rather somber aspect.

She arose on Dick's entrance and advanced.

"Mr. Bristol, I believe?" she said.

"Yes, ma'm. Are you Louise Lester?"

"I am."

"You sent for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, here I am, at your service. I did not have your address, but, on consulting a Directory, I came to the conclusion that you must be the right party, so I made it a point to come here first."

"I am glad you did, for I have been quite anxiously waiting for you."

"Well, now that I am here, what can I do for you?"

"In order to explain that it will be necessary to know something about us—me and my poor misguided brother."

"Exactly, if he is involved in the case."

"Well, we are orphans, but western people, like yourself. Our parents died several years ago, leaving us a considerable sum of money. We were young and foolish, and possessed of a strong desire to see this city, so we set forth. We had always been accustomed to living well, and so came to this house. I found the people very sociable, but, as Frank detested society, we gradually drifted apart, and did not see much of each other, I am ashamed to say."

"Poor Frank! I had always before possessed a sort of controlling influence over him, though I was his junior, but now that he was in a measure cut loose from me, he grew wild. He fell in among a crowd of fast young men—sporting men they call them here—he drank and gambled, and, in one short year, his share of the fortune was gone."

"Then he came to me and wanted a portion of mine, but, knowing to what use it would be put, I promptly and positively refused him. Was I not right?"

"You were."

"Well, Frank went off in the sulks, and did not come near me for weeks. Finally he came one night to bid me good-bye, for a while, he said. He had had two paid-up insurance policies upon his life, and these he sold at a sacrifice, in order to realize money to satisfy his pressing gambling debts."

"He then left, and has never been seen in New York since."

"How much were these policies for?" Dick asked.

"Ten thousand each."

"Payable after death?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"To the heir named in his will."

"Who was that heir to be?"

"I do not know, except it would be myself, as we have no other relatives."

"Was Frank married?"

"No!"

"Sure of that?"

"Well, if he ever was, I never knew anything about it."

"Do you know what place he most frequented?"

"I think some one of the clubs on Fifth avenue, and also the uptown hotels."

"Do you know who purchased or loaned money on these policies?"

"No, I do not!"

"Do you think there has been foul play, Miss Lester?"

"I am afraid so."

"And you want me to undertake to investigate the matter?"

"I do."

"Then, answer me this: Do you know of any young man with whom your brother particularly used to chum?"

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Fred Ferris."

"Where does he live?"

"At the Morton House."

"Very well. I will let you know when I have any news. Good-day!"

And Dick bowed himself out.

CHAPTER II.

MISS LOUISE LESTER.

It will not be hard to guess at Deadwood Dick's thoughts, as he betook himself back to the Morton House.

Here was a case suggestive of foul play.

Frank Lester, a spendthrift, and a *roue*, had run through with his fortune. In order to continue his career of dissipation, he had disposed of his policies, at a sacrifice; but to whom?

This was the important question.

If the party who had furnished the money to Frank, should be of an avaricious turn of mind he might wish to realize upon his investment as soon as possible, as insurance companies are not always to be depended on.

In this case, the sooner Frank Lester was out of the way, the quicker the investor would get his returns.

There are firms who do a business in loaning money on policies, clerks' salaries, and a handsome business they do, too.

Maybe Lester had fallen into their clutches?

Or, maybe he had committed suicide—who could tell?

By the time Dick had reached the hotel, he had firmly settled his mind on one thing: He would sift this matter to the bottom, if it took him a year.

He had already formed two of his plans. First, he would see Fred Ferris and "size him up;" then he would find out, if possible, in what companies Frank Lester had been insured.

Such information as he thus might be able to gain, possibly would lead to the solution of the whole.

So, on his arrival at the Morton House, he made inquiries of the clerk.

"Does Mr. Ferris live here?"

"He does not, but he drops in about every day."

"Do you know where I can find him at present?"

"In the bar, probably."

"Thank you!" and Dick adjourned to the bar, where he found a number of people—"ham-fatters," would-be tragedians, and others of the dramatic "perfesh," with a lavish display of imaginary diamonds.

But, of this crowd, Dick was at a loss to single out Fred Ferris.

So he said to the bartender:

"Can you point out to me Mr. Fred Ferris?"

"Yes. Yonder man with the big nose and black mustache."

Dick took a good look at the individual indicated.

His hair, eyes and mustache were jetty black, and his nose very large. He was short and corpulent.

It took but one glance at him to decide that he was a Jew, or, at least, of Jewish descent.

He dressed quite "loud," smoked cigarettes, and sported a gold-headed cane.

"A chap that I do not fancy," Dick muttered.

However, he approached him.

"Are you Mr. Ferris?" he asked.

"I am, sir."

"Did you ever know a man by the name of Frank Lester?"

"Yes."

"You were quite intimate?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Lester?"

"Well, no. I'd like to know what has become of him myself."

"When did you see him last?"

"Well, I don't know just how long—a good many days."

"You have not heard from him since?"

"No."

"Think he has left town?"

"No, I don't think so."

"His associations were rather fast, were they not?"

"Well, yes; he was one of the boys, you know, free and jolly."

"Do you know if he had any intrigues with women?"

"I think not. Never saw him with a woman in my life, except once or twice with his sister."

"Did he gamble?"

"Savagely!"

"And lost?"

"Yes, almost constantly."

"How much money do you think he had the last time you saw him?"

"Less than one hundred dollars."

"Have you heard of his selling his insurance policies?"

"Yes."

"Do you know to whom he sold them?"

"No."

"Do you know his sister?"

"I do."

"What kind of a girl is she?"

"I know nothing for or against her. But, see here. Do you take me for a bureau of information?"

"Yes."

"On what grounds?"

"Because I am an officer of the law and am entitled to the right of so doing."

"Ah! you are a detective?" said Ferris.

"I am."

"Glad to meet you. I sometimes try my hand at that sort of thing myself, but never have yet achieved a success. I can detect bed-bugs at night and the ardent in daytime. That is about all. By the way, come and have a drink."

To this Dick did not object. If he could get this gent in an exhilarated state, he might learn more.

He fancied that Ferris knew more than he chose to disclose.

In Dick's mind was a queer suspicion; no, not really a suspicion, but, rather, a theory.

When he first saw Louise Lester, his attention was attracted to her eyes.

There was a singular expression in them, which he did not mind at the time, but it now recurred to him.

If Frank Lester was out of the way, and had made a will previously, in favor of his sister—?

Well, here was a point to be looked up.

Dick and Ferris had their drinks, and then, lighting their cigars, adjourned to the hotel office and sat down.

"Now," said Dick, "if you are of a detective turn of mind, why have you not investigated this disappearance of Frank Lester? Twenty thousand dollars are involved in the case, and you being familiar with the habits and associations of Lester, ought to know something about the matter."

"Not having been reminded of the case before, my dear sir, I thought nothing about it."

"Where did you see Lester last?"

"Let me see. Oh! I remember—on Broadway, at the St. Denis. He wanted me to dine with him."

"You refused?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"I had another engagement that prevented."

"Was he intoxicated at the time?"

"No! Not seeing him since, led me to believe that he had gone off on a protracted spree."

"What do you think about it, now, Mr. Ferris?"

"I don't know what to think. I begin to believe that some harm has befallen him!"

"Nothing more likely. Now, look here: You are wealthy, I presume. Am I right?"

"You are not," Ferris replied. "On the contrary, I am as poor as a church mouse."

Even the drinks we just had were put on the slate."

"Poor policy!"

"Very true, but sometimes mighty accommodating."

"Well, now, you skirmish around this city, and find the last person who saw Frank Lester. Find when and where he was last seen."

"I'll try it, with pleasure."

"You will need some money?"

"I suppose so."

"Very well. Here are ten dollars, which I give you on my own account. I don't know whether I will ever get a red out of this job or not, but we'll push it through, anyhow."

"I'll help you to the best of my ability."

"Very well. Do your best, and you will be paid, if it has to come out of my own pocket."

"Then to business at once. Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

And Ferris took his leave.

CHAPTER III.

MARKS, THE PAWNBROKER.

AFTER the departure of Ferris, Dick sat a while in the hotel office, in deep meditation.

The impression that Louise Lester knew more about her brother's disappearance than any one else was still rife in his mind. But, if she was guilty, why had she sent for him?

Was it an offset to disguise her complicity in a crime?

Such things had happened before, one case being in Dick's own detective experience.

"I'll call on Miss Lester again," he decided. "The more I see of her, the better I shall be able to judge whether she is to be suspected or not."

So he left the hotel, hired a hack, and was driven to the Murray Hill Hotel.

Miss Lester was in, and received him graciously.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Bristol. I hope you bring me good news."

"On the contrary, I bring you none. I come for information."

"Of what sort?"

"In what companies was your brother insured?"

"In the Prudential and in the Manhattan."

"Did he receive the policies through an agency in this city, or direct from the home offices?"

"In this city, I believe."

"Still, for all you know so much about this insurance business, you don't know where he placed or disposed of his policies?"

"No, I do not."

Dick eyed her for a moment doubtfully, and then said:

"I will find out."

"Then you will receive your reward," was the calm response.

"Have you any near relatives?" Dick asked.

"None at all."

"Quite sure?"

"I am. But, why do you question me so rigidly?"

"That is my business. To be successful a detective oftentimes has to put his client in a humiliating position."

Miss Lester looked serious.

"For God's sake, you don't suspect me?" she gasped.

"I have not yet formed any settled opinion. That is what I want to do, however, in order to get at my work. I have put an assistant on the track to find out some points, and hope to make a success out of this job, as I have out of many others."

Miss Lester smiled.

It was the first time since he had seen her that Dick had noticed that kind of a smile upon her face, and it unconsciously increased his suspicion of her.

"I will try the insurance companies," he mused, "and maybe they will be able to give me some information."

So he bade Miss Lester good-day, and took his departure.

He now more than ever was impressed with the idea that Louise Lester was accountable for her brother's disappearance—or, at least, knew all about that disappearance.

If so, it was for the sake, very likely, of getting the insurance on his life.

But could it be that a sister would cause the murder of her own brother for the sake of becoming heir to his property?

Such cases have happened—so why not in this instance?

Dick went first to the New York office of the Prudential Company.

Asking to see the president, he was told that he was not in, but that the superintendent would see him. So he was shown into the latter's office, where he introduced himself and his business.

"Have you on your list a man insured as Frank Lester?"

"We have."

"He has a paid-up policy?"

"Yes."

"For how much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Has he been here lately?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Has any attempt been made to collect the amount of his policy?"

"No, I am sure not."

"Do you know what now is Mr. Lester's address?"

"I do not—haven't the slightest idea. I have heard that he has been leading a pretty fast life lately."

As this was about all the information to be gleaned at this point, Dick sought the office of the Manhattan, to receive no better answers to his inquiries.

Lester had not been seen lately, nor had any demand been made upon his policy; nor did the officials know of his whereabouts.

Evidently nothing was to be found out from this source, so the detective returned to the hotel, yet now more than ever determined to sift the matter to the bottom.

At the hotel he encountered Ferris.

"Well, what's the news?" Dick asked.

"Not much. The last man, or rather the last person Frank was seen with was a woman?"

"His sister?"

"Yes. So far as I can find out, Miss Louise was the last one he was seen with."

"At what particular place?"

"At the Casino."

"Who gave you this information?"

"An acquaintance of mine, who was likewise an acquaintance of Frank's. He happened to see them there."

"Did they leave together?"

"Yes."

"Did you find out anything else?"

"Yes. This same night, before the show, Lester was seen in company with a man named Marks."

"Marks, the lawyer?"

"Oh! no! Not even as reputable a man as that Marks. This man is a Baxter street sheeney, who dabbles in any thing there is a profit in."

"Well, what do you suppose Frank Lester was doing in his company?"

"Dunno."

"Do you know where this Mark's place is?"

"I do."

"Then, I will see you here to-morrow morning. We will pay Mr. Marks a visit. Perhaps he may be able to enlighten us."

CHAPTER IV.

THE INSURANCE CASE.

That ended that day's work, so far as tramping around was concerned.

Dick retired early, and the next morning,

as he was going down to breakfast, he found Ferris awaiting him in the office.

"Any news?" Dick asked.

"None. Are you ready to visit Marks?"

"After breakfast."

"All right. I will wait for you."

So Dick went into the dining-room, and while eating the waiter brought him a newspaper, by mistake one of an old date. Dick idly glanced it over, even to the advertising columns, where he was electrified to come across the following:

"WANTED: A loan upon two insurance policies (paid up), the loan to be not less than five thousand dollars. Value of policies, \$20,000.

"Apply by letter, F. L., 12, *World*."

Here was a ray of light. Not much of a one to be sure, but there might be in it the very clew he wanted. So Dick took the paper out to Ferris.

"What do you think of this?" he asked.

Ferris read the advertisement and shrugged his shoulders.

"That is correct, I believe. Frank was hard up, and I guess he had pawned all he had, except the policies."

"Would this Marks advance money on such papers?"

"I don't think so, but he would buy anything from a diamond to a bull-dog."

"He is an old miser, then?"

"You can bet! He has got three fine residences, and no end to money."

"Does he do a regular pawnbroker's business?"

"No."

"Simply buys and sells."

"Yes. His place is more like a junk-shop than anything else."

"Is he married?"

"No."

"Has he any employees?"

"No. He transacts all his business himself."

"Well, come. We will go and see him. If he knows anything about Frank Lester, I will soon find it out."

"I doubt it."

"Why?"

"Marks is very sharp. He keeps his secrets close."

Baxter street contains a motley assemblage of foreigners—not of recent importation, but of those who have lived and thrived there for years.

The population consists largely of Hebrews, Poles and Italians, with a mixture of Germans.

The two detectives, ere long, were at Marks's junk-shop, and a hard-looking building it was without, while, within, it was a veritable museum.

Ferris had told the truth; except coffins and gravestones, nearly everything else was there to be found.

Mr. Marks was in.

He was an old man, and to Dick's surprise unlike the average of the Jews of Baxter street.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"You can give us some information, I trust," Dick answered.

"Yes? Well, what?"

"I understand you buy all kinds of stuff upon which you can make on your investment?"

"Yes, that is my business."

"Do you ever buy bonds?"

"Yes! I deal largely in all kinds of bonds."

"And insurance policies?"

"Yes, of course, if they are paid up."

"Do you know a young man named Lester?"

"Frank Lester?"

"Yes."

"I do. We have had some good times together."

"When did you see him last?"

"Not for a month. I think he must have

forgotten poor old Marks. He used to come around and talk with me two or three times a week, and sometimes he was short and I would lend him a few dollars."

"Did you ever buy any insurance policies from him?"

"No."

"Now, look out, Marks! Tell the truth, for if you don't, you are liable to arrest. Mr. Frank Lester had twenty thousand dollars on his life, and sold his policies, in order to realize money to continue a protracted spree. Since then he has not been seen. If you know anything about those policies, you will find it to your interest to own up to it, and save yourself a lot of trouble."

Marks shrugged his shoulders.

"Trouble don't bother me, any more," he said. "I have been in trouble all my life. As to buying any insurance policies from Frank Lester, I did not. If he had offered them for sale, I doubt if I would have taken them."

"Why not?"

"For two reasons: money has been scarce with me, of late, and I realize but little out of my purchases. Then, too, Frank was liable to live a great number of years, if he shut off drinking, as he said he should!"

Nothing more was to be gained of Mr. Marks, so the two returned to the hotel.

"Now, what?" Ferris inquired. "Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Yes. Have you any idea of how you could shadow the movements of Louise Lester?"

"Well, yes; I think I might be able to manage it."

"Then, that will be your part of the job. See where she goes, and whom she meets. If she meets any disreputable characters, report to me at once."

"Then you suspect her?"

"Yes; I may confess I do."

"Pshaw! She would not be guilty of a conspiracy against Frank."

"Don't be too sure about that. There's the devil lurking in those black eyes of hers, if I'm any judge."

"Well, I'll do your bidding, but you can bet your life you're on a false trail, my friend."

"Maybe so. But there's no harm in being sure."

So Ferris again took his departure, leaving Dick alone to plot and plan.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN FROM PERKINSVILLE.

THERE walked into the Morton House a raw-boned, six-foot countryman from "'way back." That he was a countryman there could be no dispute, for, although the proverbial hay-seed was not in his hair or faded whiskers, his dress proved that he was far from being acquainted with a fashionable tailor.

Dick was talking with the clerk when this gentleman came up.

"How d'ye do?" said the man from "'way back," addressing the clerk. "Reckon ye don't remember me."

"No, sir."

"Well, I'm Josiah Lester, from Perkinsville, New York, and the town clerk up thar. Last time I was in New York I stopped at this tavern, and that's my intention now, ef you've got a spare bedroom."

"I guess we can accommodate you, sir. If you will register—"

"Oh! no hurry fer that. I'll look around a bit. Got any good hard cider?"

"You will have to go to the bar for your drinks."

Josiah turned to Dick.

"Say, young feller, will ye come and jine me? I never like to drink alone."

"With pleasure," Dick replied. "Come right this way."

So they adjourned to the bar, where Mr. Lester "set 'em up."

Dick took beer, and Josiah something stronger.

He first asked for hard cider, but was told that they did not keep it.

"Don't keep hard cider! Well, darn my skin ef you orten't be shot! Why, there ain't another town in the State what don't keep hard cider, and at the tavern up in Perkinsville, they've laid by fifty bar'l's, that would make yer hair curl. However, ef you hain't got no cider give me a swaller o' rye whisky."

When they had disposed of the drinks, Dick opened up on the question uppermost in his mind.

"Your name is Lester, I believe?" he said.

"Yes, sir-ee—Josiah Lester, town clerk of Perkinsville."

"Have you any relatives?"

"Well, yes, I guess so, if they hain't all gone under."

"Have you a relative named Frank Lester?"

"Lord, yes! He's my nephew. He gits all my fortune, when I'm under the sod. 'Tain't much—a hundred acres of land, ninety head o' sheep, twelve cattle, four suckin' calves, twenty hens, forty chickens, ten geese, ten ducks, two rabbits, ten turkeys, four guinea hens, and a bull-dog. Yas, I come down heer, on purpose to see Frank. Forgot to tell ye—I've got six horses, too, and any one of 'em is able to pull two ton."

"Where did you expect to meet Frank Lester?" Dick asked.

"Why, here, at this 'ere tavern. He writ me ef I'd come and see him, we'd have a thunderin' good time. I couldn't git away 'til I got my 'taters planted, and set the hired hand to work on the cornfield. Then I jest put on my suspenders, and skipped, tho' Samantha didn't like et fer shucks."

"May be Samantha thought you were off to see the elephant?"

"Well, mebbe. She's gittin' darned suspicious in her old age. So you know Frank, do you?"

"I do not, but I am searching for him."

"Sho! What for?"

"Because he has mysteriously disappeared."

"Thunder! How d'ye mean?"

"Well, it seems that he had been leading a fast life, and had run through with his fortune. When that was gone, having two insurance policies on his life he sold them. Since then he has not been seen!"

Josiah Lester groaned.

"He's been murdered!" he gasped.

"I would not be surprised!"

"Who employed you on this case, for I reckon you're a detective?"

Old man Lester turned to the bartender.

"When was Frank Lester here last?" he demanded.

"I have not seen him lately, sir."

"Do ye know where he is?"

"Haven't the slightest idea, sir. He used to hang out here occasionally, but for some days past has not been around."

Dick touched the farmer on the arm.

"Nothing to be learned here," he said.

"Come with me. I want to question you."

They adjourned to the reading-room and sat down.

"Now, Mr. Lester," said Dick, "what influence over Frank did his sister have?"

"What do ye mean?"

"You heard what I said?"

"Yes, I did; but, by the great horned spoon, I don't know what ye'r drivin' at. The gal you mean ain't the boy's sister, for he never had one. My brother, Uriah, adopted her from the poor-house, at Bath, when she was a baby, and fetched her up."

"Your brother went West?"

"Yas, he went as fur as Pittsburg once."

"Never any further?"

"No."

"Did he leave a fortune to Frank and Louise?"

"Yes."

"Where did he make this fortune?"

"In the oil regions of Pennsylvania—part in Titusville, and the balance at McClintic farm, where he struck a spouter, a reg'lar whooper! Thousand bar'l's a day. Et tuk twenty men and ten hosses to cart et away, to prevent spoilin' the grass. And you'd hardly believe et, the darned stuff puked out of the ground so fast that they actually had to scoop et up in tin pails, buckets and tomato cans."

"Wonderful," said Dick. "But, never mind."

"The matter for us to consider just now is, will we be able to find Frank Lester or not?"

"Thunderation! he *must* be found, ef I have to sell my farm. Hev you seen the gal?"

"Yes, and questioned her rigidly, but she denies any knowledge of his whereabouts."

"Humph!"

And Josiah took off his aged hat, and scratched his head.

"Darned queer!" he said. "I never liked that girl, from the time my brother adopted her."

"Why not?"

"Cause, when she was goin' ter school she uster hev the repertation of tellin' more lies than any other scholar. She'd steal, too!"

"What is her real name?"

"Louise Breck. Her father, Bill, was sent to prison fer burglary, and after he served his term and got out, he disappeared."

"Did you ever see this Breck?"

"Well, I guess. I've seen him more times than I've got fingers and toes. Et war a long time ago, tho', for he got sent up for ten years."

"He must be an old man now?"

"Yas; about fifty."

"Would you know him if you were to see him?"

"I reckon I would. He's got a number of personal defects by which I should recognize him. Why, darn it! man, part of his nose is gone! He and 'Rast Higgins, of Bath, got into a scrap, and 'Rast chawed off the end of his nose."

This was information that Dick decided "meant business," so, leaving the loquacious Josiah free to go out and hunt up his coveted hard cider, Dick cogitated over his plans, more resolved than ever not to be thwarted in his purpose to run down his game and solve the mystery of young Frank's disappearance.

CHAPTER VI.

FERRIS REPORTS.

WHEN, at length, Ferris put in an appearance, he found Dick awaiting his report, so he proceeded to relate his story.

"I got a room at the hotel opposite Louise's, and left my door ajar, so that if she went out, I could see her."

"Did she go out?"

"No; but she had a caller."

"Who was he?"

"One of the worst crooks in New York. He hain't been out of Sing Sing more than two months."

"But, his name?"

"Bill Breck."

"The blazes you say! Why, that is the father of Louise!"

"You don't mean it?"

"But I do, though!"

"Why, Bill Breck is a tough. Surely Louise don't take after *him*?"

"I'm not so sure. It wouldn't surprise me much to have to arrest her."

"On suspicion?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe that she is the guilty one. It seems so unnatural."

"All the same, I believe now that she has had all to do in Frank's disappearance."

"Well, I'll not attempt to gainsay it; but take a tip from me before you go too far."

"What kind of one?"

"Be sure you are right before you go ahead. Louise Lester has got money."

"What of that?"

"Why, if she is as wicked as you seem to think, she certainly will have you knocked on the head if you attempt to criminate her."

Dick laughed.

"No danger of that," he assured. "I'll take all such risks."

"You may take them once too often."

"Oh, never mind that. How long did this Breck stay with Louise?"

"An hour."

"Did you ever hear any of their conversation?"

"No; couldn't possibly do that."

"Well, I want you to go back and resume your vigil. I will give you the money to meet your needs. To find out the true state of affairs between her and Breck must now be our first effort."

"All right; I'll do my best and report as soon as I find out anything of value to you."

So Dick gave him a sum of money sufficient for the present.

"You can go, now," he said. "First, however, do you know where Breck hangs out?"

"I think so. It is down on the Bowery, Joe Ricketts's saloon."

"Is he a slugger?"

"So they say. He is an all-round tough, and his place is a resort for that class of men."

Ferris took his departure, to resume surveillance over Louise Lester.

As for Deadwood Dick, he set about arranging to visit the Ricketts saloon. He overhauled his trunk and soon had selected a rig that when donned would make him look as tough as the toughest. He then armed himself, and set off for the Bowery.

CHAPTER VII.

BILL BRECK, THE CROOK.

JOE RICKETTS's saloon on the Bowery, below H— street, to all goodly disposed people, is regarded as a fit place to stay away from.

It is a resort for second-rate prize-fighters, and fakirs of all sorts, and is one of the several very "hard" dens on the Bowery.

When Dick arrived at the saloon, he found a few persons drinking at the bar and discussing the relative merits of various prize-fighters

His arrival did not attract any notice, for his make-up as one of the toughs seemed to avert all suspicion.

"Give me some booze," he said, swaggering up to the bar. "I'm drier than a smoked herring."

But one man was present who he thought might be Breck, and the gang called him Bill.

He was past middle age—was tall and gaunt, but evidently possessed of great strength.

His face was a repulsive one, being disfigured by a number of livid scars, and a portion of his nose was wanting, as Josiah had stated.

As Dick swallowed his beverage, this personage advanced to the counter.

"Hello, Blinker!" he exclaimed, slapping Dick familiarly on the shoulder. "When d'ye git out?"

"Get out of where?"

"Why, out of State's Prison, to be sure!"

"I never was in State's Prison," replied Dick; "and, more than that, my name ain't Blinker."

"Git out! Ain't you Jack Blinker, what was in Sing Sing when I was there?"

"Not a bit of it. Never heard of Blinker."

"Well, you look like him. If you ain't him, who are you?"

"Punch Peters is my name."

"Oh, ye'r' a puncher, hey?"

"Yes, somewhat."

"Well, this is the home fer sluggers, and these are all good fellers, who have licked their man. Goin' to treat?"

"Dunno. Bout as much as I can do to treat myself."

"Better treat. You'll save trouble by doing it."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Bill Breck, and I am a corner with my dukes!"

"Never killed any dead men, did you, Mr. Breck?"

"But, I am liable to break your head if you don't treat!"

"In that case, I reckon I'll be under the necessity of setting 'em up," Dick replied; so he ordered the bartender to set forth the bottle, and invited all hands up.

By thus doing he gained the approval of the crowd, and avoided any trouble.

He did not remain long at the saloon, but, leaving it, took up his position on the opposite side of the street where he could see Breck, when he came out.

Here he watched and waited, resolving to follow him when he came forth.

But no Breck appeared for a full hour.

"Tain't likely he will come 'til he gets full," thought Dick.

He was right, for when the ex-convict did issue from the saloon, he was so much under the influence of drink, that he could scarcely stand up.

He was accompanied by another tough nearly as boozy as himself, and locking arms, the two reeled off, together.

"Now to find out where they go," muttered Dick, as he shadowed 'em.

From the Bowery, they turned off into Hester street, and thence into Mott, the metropolitan paradise of the heathen Chinese.

Along this narrow, overcrowded thoroughfare they reeled, at last bringing up before a dirty-looking dwelling, the blinds of which were tightly closed.

To all appearances, no one lived there.

Breck took time to throw up what he had drank, and then, mounting the steps, rang the bell.

The door opened as if by mechanism, and Breck and his companion entered.

Then the door closed.

"Well, that ends *this* trail for the present," Dick mused. "I've trailed the ex-convict to his lair, I reckon. Now to find out the character of this house. It has a mysterious appearance."

There was a grocery store on the next corner, whose owner was a German, and, withal, an intelligent fellow.

Mr. Snider was in, but was not particularly busy.

"Mr. Snider?" inquired Dick.

"Yah. Dot vas me."

"I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Vel, why don't you ask 'em?"

"Have you lived long in this street?"

"Apoud two years."

"There is a house a few doors from here, with tightly-closed blinds."

"Yah."

"Who owns it?"

"I don'd vas know dot."

"Who keeps it?"

"I don'd know dot, neider. She vas a voomans."

"What is the character of the house?"

"Bad—bad as you makes 'em."

"In what respect?" Dick asked.

"Vel, you know dem tings v'ot dey put around door-yards—fences?"

"Yes."

"Vel, dot vas v'ot dey call dot house. I see no fence there. I guess how dey must have it on der inside, hey?"

"That's not the idea. A fence is a place for the reception of stolen goods. Much obliged for your information."

"Not at all. V'en you wants some groceries, come around and see me, eh?"

"I will."

"Don'd you deal mit dot Italian across der way; he skin you oud of all your money."

"All right. Good-by."

"Good-by. V'en you want any good limburger, you come to me. I haf got some dot vill make your hair got curly."

"Thank you. The next time I want to go to a fancy ball I will call on you."

Repassing the shuttered house, Dick made a discovery—one of the cellar windows, fronting on the street, was wide open, probably for ventilation.

"By Jove! that is a chance," Dick muttered. "Most likely a servant has left it open. I'll call around again after a while, when it's dark. If that window is still open, I'll know what is going on in that house."

Then he passed on, but he had got only a block away, when he felt a slap on the shoulder.

Turning he beheld Josiah Lester!

"Why, darn my skin!" ejaculated the man from Perkinsville, "what on 'arth ye doin' in this make-up?"

"Oh! a little skirmishing."

"After Frank?"

"Yes."

"But you won't find him. I reckon he's gone up the spout. But, come along; I've got something to show you what ain't to be beat."

"What?"

"A game they call fan-tan."

"Where?"

"Did ye notice a closed house back here, a few doors?"

"I did."

"Well, it's there. I won fifty dollars there, in ten minutes."

"And lost a hundred?"

"Not much!"

"Chinamen run it?"

Dick "bit at the bait," with avidity—not that he suspected Josiah of any complicity in the disappearance of Frank, but his offer opened up an opportunity for the detective to get into this Mott street house, without exciting undue suspicion.

"No," the place ain't run by Chinamen," said Josiah, "though there is some that go there, to gamble. There's a beautiful woman runs it. They say she comes from Chicago. I tell ye what ef Samantha war not livin', I'd pop the question to her!"

"And get 'popped'!"

"No. She's kinder stuck on me."

Dick could not refrain from laughing.

"Stuck on your boodle, more likely!"

"No she ain't. Are ye comin' along?"

"Well, to accommodate you, yes."

So they journeyed back toward the closed house—Josiah taking the lead. He evidently well knew the way.

"Now, if all works well, I'll know if Frank Lester is in this house, or is not, thought the wide-awake detective.

On their arrival at the door, Josiah rung the bell three times.

The door opened, but no one appeared.

They walked in, and the door slammed shut.

CHAPTER VIII.

CIRCE.

THE hall they entered, was, after the door was closed, dark, so they could not see. But, Josiah grasped Dick by the arm, and led him to the second floor, where they entered a large room, or rather, two connecting rooms, with big folding doors between.

There were card-tables and easy-chairs scattered about.

Several Chinamen were playing at fan-tan. A red-and-black game was in pro-

gress, and the woman who ran the place, presided at a faro-table.

Several others were engaged in various games of chance.

The proprietress was a beauty.

She reminded Dick of a Gypsy.

She was quite dark, with perfect features, and black eyes and hair which she wore abandon.

She had a graceful, willowy figure, and she dressed magnificently.

Her diamonds were simply elegant.

Dick and Josiah paused to gaze at her.

"Mighty fine critter, ain't she?" questioned Josiah.

"Very good-looking."

"Kin ye beat it, out West?"

"Yes."

"Bet yer!"

"Why, man, we grow 'em out there like you people never saw. You come West and see."

"Yas, ef Samantha were to peg out, I would go inter a raffle fer this here gal. Deacon Leeds of Perkinsville would tear his hair to see me fetch sech a gal home, darn me ef he wouldn't. We shined up Samantha, when I was young, but I was the purtiest of the two, so I got her. Then, he hed ter marry an old maid."

"Just what would do you good. If you hang out around New York long and go bumming about like this you will have neither money, nor your wife."

"Why not?"

"Because some one will rob you of your money, and you will lose your wife in the bargain."

"Not much. The old woman is home tending to the stock, and don't ye fergit it. When ye fool her, you've got to get up afore daylight."

"Better stick to her, then."

"Why?"

"Because I'll guarantee the woman at the table don't arise 'fore noon."

"Lazy?"

"Yes, and crooked too."

"How crooked?"

"A thief maybe."

"No, sir-ee. She's a born and bred lady. Bet you!"

"Perhaps."

Just then there was a commotion.

One of the men at the faro table had lost heavily.

"Curse you!" he said, arising and addressing the lady who was dealing. "Your false dealing has ruined me. None like you shall live to do that."

With that he would have fired, had not Dick sprung forward and grappled with him, bearing him to the floor.

Then ensued a struggle.

Both men were well matched.

If anything, Dick was the lighter of the two.

They rolled over and over in a death-grip. It took all precaution for Dick to keep from losing his disguise.

The crowd looked on with interest.

Even Josiah did not attempt to interfere.

Finally Dick got his right hand free.

With one crushing blow, he put his man to sleep; then he arose, and was greeted with applause.

"Bravo!" cried the crowd.

"Hurray!" yelled old Josiah.

The fair proprietress now advanced.

"I have my life to thank you for," she said.

"Oh! don't mention it. I'd not see any person harm one so fair as you."

Mademoiselle Circe, as she was generally known, blushed prettily. "Thank you," was expressed in her eyes, although she did not utter the words.

"You are a stranger?" she said, interrogatively.

"Well, yes, rather. I have been in New York before, however, for a short time."

"You are not what you seem," said Circe. "You are disguised. Why so?"

"Oh! a gentleman who is out on a little racket does not always like to be recognized. But how did you know I was disguised?"

"Oh! I've got eyes. Will you come and try your hand at faro?"

"Yes, let's go in fer et," urged Josiah. "I'll be blarsted ef I don't believe I kin clean the board. Ef I kin, why I'll buy Deacon Grimes's steers when I get home, and my old woman shall have a span new caliker dress, be gosh!"

"Well, if Samantha has to wait for the dress until you clean the board, I'm afraid she will have rather a long wait," said Dick, "for I don't allow it's a very easy job. However, we can try a few dollars on it, if you like."

"All right. But hadn't we better hev su'thin' to take, first. They hain't got no hard cider here, but they hev got some mighty good whisky, I tell ye. And I'm a purty good judge, 'specially about hayin' time."

"Then we give the hired man buttermilk, and I take hard cider and whisky. They do say that for a reg'lar church-goin' citizen, who hires his own pew, and pays five dollars a year fur it, and furnishes the preacher with hams, chickens, eggs, and all sorts of farm produce, that I kin knock the socks off all of 'em on drinkin' hard cider."

Here Josiah was forced to stop for want of breath.

So they adjourned to the faro-table.

Josiah was quite exuberant over his first winning, which was fifty dollars.

"I'll have them steers, by thunder!" he ejaculated. "I kin buy 'em for fifty dollars, and a bar'l of hard cider."

But Josiah's fifty soon melted.

Dick began to place his money to effect, and within a few minutes had won over a thousand dollars.

By this last bet of Dick's all the players retired from the table.

"The bank is broke!" cried Circe. "No more faro now."

"She is weakenin'!" muttered Josiah. "She ain't a bit like Samantha. She was never known to weaken."

Samantha was evidently what a Western man would in his vernacular call a "rip snorter."

At least so Dick judged.

Fortunately Samantha was not present.

Mademoiselle Circe tapped Dick on the shoulder.

"Come," she said, imperiously. "I want to speak to you in private."

Bidding Josiah await his return, Dick accompanied Circe.

They went to an adjoining parlor, and became seated.

"Now," said Dick, "what can I do for you?"

"You are a detective."

"You have hit it."

"You have come here to pull my house."

"I'm hardly strong enough for that. It would require a big power to do a thing like that."

"Oh! none of your sarcasm. Whatever brought you here?"

"My legs."

"Did the Central send you?"

"No."

"Then why are you here?"

"My friend invited me."

"But you were in the neighborhood before that."

"How do you know?"

"That's none of your business. I know, and that is enough."

"Well, if I was in the neighborhood, what of that? It does not signify that I came here to pull your place."

"Do you aver that you did not?"

"Except on the witness-stand, ma'm'selle, I aver nothing. But, I'll tell you one thing, if you know anything of the whereabouts of

Frank Lester, you had better tell me, for I shall arrest the first man that knows anything about him, and I'll bet my hat, coat and shirt, that you do."

"Frank Lester? I don't know such a person."

"Do you happen to be acquainted with a person by the name of Bill Breck?"

Mademoiselle started, and glared at the detective, in evident astonishment.

"Who is Bill Breck?" she demanded.

"You ought to know, since he is an inmate of your house."

"He is not!"

"Well, I saw him come here, just the same, and that, too, not half an hour ago."

"I know nothing about him, nor this Lester, for whom you inquire. If I did, I would tell you. Although I keep a gambling place, I am not in any ways a crook. If I lose, I pay. If you lose, you pay. That is my motto, and a pretty good one, too, as you will acknowledge."

"Yes, if adhered to. But, I hardly think that is the case. Mottoes are for the home circle, not for places of this sort."

Mam'selle did not appreciate this.

She turned away in a huff.

While Dick returned to Josiah, who was at the bar, loading up with apple-jack, the nearest approach to hard cider he could find.

"I guess we had better adjourn to some other salubrious climate, eh, general?" suggested Dick.

"Waal, yes. Whar shall we go? I was jest consultin' with the jack bottle, in regard to goin' back to Perk. Strikes me I'd like to see Samantha, and Samantha would like to see me. What d'ye think?"

"I'll give you a tip on one thing," said Dick. "If Samantha was ever to catch you here, she would tear all the wool out of your head."

"Well, I dunno but you are about right. She is a reg'lar old whooper, when she gits her tantrums on, and I'll tell ye what, I once had to climb the straw-stack, to save gittin' hit over the cocoanut with a flail, and all because I went down to a neighbor's to get some early berries, and had a dozen or so glasses of hard cider. Et was scented with wintergreen essence and Samantha detected it. She had been there herself."

By this time Josiah had become pretty well winded, and he and Dick left the place and returned up-town.

The old man was pretty full, but he was still able to walk pretty straight.

"That aire Circe are a purty gal," he kept muttering. "At first, I war tempted tew marry her, and shake Samantha. But that won't do. A pecooliar feelin' it come over me that I can't account for. Ye see, I once had a gal myself, but she run away from home 'cause I horsewhipped her."

"What for?"

"Stealin' my harvest apples."

"Serves you right. She ought to have turned around and shot you."

"How so?"

"Is not your own child entitled to what she wants to eat?"

"Not off of my harvest tree. Them aire apples is fer me an' the hired man, an' even my old woman darsen't tech one."

Dick turned away in disgust.

"You'd better go home," he said.

"Why so?"

"Because you're of no use. You may be good enough to hoe potatoes, or weed onions, but you're no use here. What little money you have got you had better use to convey you back to your home at Perkinsville!"

Dick then left him.

The detective expected that he had seen the last of Circe for a time, but on his arrival at the hotel later in the day, he was surprised to receive a notice from the clerk that a lady was awaiting him in the parlor.

"Louise Lester?"

"She did not give her name, sir."

"What kind of a looking woman?"

"Medium height, and mighty pretty."

Dick went up to the parlor.

He had already removed his disguise, and resumed his usual appearance.

There was only one person in the parlor when he entered.

It was a woman.

She sat by a window, looking out upon Union Square.

As Dick approached her, she turned about and faced him.

It was Circe!

She was beautifully attired, and the diamonds she wore were some of Tiffany's choicest.

"I believe you wished to see me," said Dick, bowing with a salute.

"Yes."

"What might your pleasure be?"

"I want to know what your pleasure is, myself. Are you hunting for Frank Lester—honest and true?"

"I am."

"Who employs you?"

Dick hesitated a moment, before he replied.

"Does it concern you particularly?" he inquired.

"Yes. It does!"

"In what sense?"

"Common sense. We were betrothed, but he disappeared during the arrangements for our nuptials."

"And he did not materialize again?"

"No. That was why I was so curious about that devil at the Murray Hill. After your conversation at my house, I could not rest 'til I saw you. So I came to warn you."

"You know Louise, then?"

"I know of her."

"Yes, women are not very complimentary toward one another."

"Well, no, not when there is a man in the case."

"You were engaged to Frank?"

"Yes."

"Did you know anything about the insurance on his life?"

"Yes. He wanted to bet it away one night, but I would not let him. I'd sooner have lost the amount myself."

"You are rich, then."

"Well off!"

"Then you would not have married Frank Lester for his money?"

"Well, I guess not, Mr. Detective. I have got money enough of my own to carry me through."

"If Frank Lester is found, what then?"

"It will be a rich feathar in your cap."

This ended the conversation, and Dick retired to his own room.

It was two days before he saw Ferris, again, and he was beginning to get dubious of him, when the gentleman turned up.

"Ah! I was wondering whether you had taken up permanent lodgings at the Murray Hill!" said Dick.

"Well, hardly! It is too swell for me. I shall have to wait until I am somewhat richer than I am now."

"Well, what news have you got?"

"I have none, as regards Louise. She remains at the hotel, the most of the time in her room."

"But you have other news."

"Yes. Breck comes to see her every day, but his calls are brief. To-day, as he left her room, I saw her give him some money. I judge it was a pretty good sum, too. When he left the hotel, I followed him."

"Where to?"

"The darned toughest place in New York, I reckon—Andy Morgan's place in Mulberry street. There's no less than four murders been committed there, in the past few years."

"What is it, a saloon?"

"Yes—a resort for the Italian element of the neighborhood."

"Well, what did Breck do there?"

"He treated the crowd, and after that he held a long consultation with an Italian by the name of Larrezo, an ex-convict, who served a term for killing his own mother."

"Did you overhear the conversation, or any part of it?"

"No; but I saw Breck give the Italian some money. This caused me to think that the Italian might have Frank Lester in his power, as a prisoner."

"It may be. Where does this Larrezo live?"

"I don't know exactly, but somewhere in Mulberry street, I presume. A large percentage of the Italian population reside in that street."

"Do you know of a woman who runs a gambling-house in Mott street, called Circe?"

"Yes."

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"Oh, she's all O. K. To be sure she runs a game, but otherwise I don't believe there is anything against her."

"I hear her place is a 'fence.'"

"I don't believe it. I've known her for several years. There may be some crooks that visit the place, but that's nothing. They hang out around most every gaming place."

"I tracked Bill Breck to this place, and even entered it myself, but after I got inside I saw nothing of him."

"It may be that he has got a room in the house."

"True, yet I hardly think so."

"If he ain't, you'd most likely have seen him in the gambling-room."

"Yes, I should think so. Do you know if Frank Lester was acquainted with this woman they call Circe?"

"Yes. I believe so."

"She says she was betrothed to him."

"Don't you believe it. Frank Lester was not betrothed to any one. He liked his freedom too much to tie himself to a woman. He was not in any sense a lady's man. He thought more of a good trotting horse than he did of all the women extant."

"I wonder what Circe's object could have been in lying to me, then?"

"I'll give it up."

"She offered to reward me if I would find Lester. It looks as if there must have been something more than common between them."

"Well, there possibly may have been, but I seriously doubt it. Frank was too proud to get into an intrigue with a woman like Circe, although she is no doubt respectable enough."

"Well, you hunt up the abode of this Larrezo, and see what kind of a place it is, and report as soon as you get any news."

"All right."

They had a drink together, and then Ferris once more set out to assist in this peculiar case.

CHAPTER IX.

LOUISE'S TREACHERY.

DEADWOOD DICK was puzzled in his quest of the whereabouts of Frank Lester. He had exhausted every clew and had found out nothing of any consequence.

"It strikes me pretty forcibly that I am throwing my time away on this case," he mused. "It looks as if, having run through with all his money, Frank Lester had gone and jumped in the river."

Still there was nothing to back this belief. If Frank Lester had committed suicide, most likely his body would have been found, ere this.

"No, he didn't commit suicide," Dick finally decided. "Young men of his gay proclivities rarely do. I must yet believe Louise and Bill Breck have put him out of the way. I'll pay Miss Louise another visit,

anyhow, and see what she has to say about Breck."

A cab soon let him out in front of the Murray Hill Hotel.

Entering, he sent up his card.

The bell-boy soon came back, and announced that Miss Lester would see Mr. Bristol, in her private parlor.

So Dick went up.

Miss Lester was seated by a window, engaged in some fancy crochet work, but arose and greeted Dick with less cordiality than before.

"Well, Mr. Bristol, be seated," she said. "I suppose you bring news of Frank?"

"No; quite the contrary. I am sorry to say that I am of the impression you know more about his whereabouts than any one else, Miss Louise."

"What gives you this idea?"

"Well, several things. In the first place, Frank Lester is *not* your brother at all, if he be living or dead."

"Sir! How dare you make such an assertion? Frank Lester *is* my brother."

"He is not. Your name is not Lester, any more than mine is Vanderbilt."

"Pray, what is it, then, if you know so much?"

"Your name is Breck. Bill Breck, the ex-convict, is your father!"

"It is false."

"It is true. I have had you shadowed, and Breck has been seen to call upon you repeatedly."

"You lie!"

"What was *he* doing here—he, a scoundrel of the worst type? Can you explain that?" demanded Dick, not at all disconcerted by her insult.

"I never saw such a man, nor do I know anything about him. I'll swear to that!"

"I hardly think I would like to take even your oath, for a person who will deliberately falsify, would not be a credible witness in a court of justice. In my first interview, you stated that you were from the Far West, whereas I am assured by Josiah Lester, of Perkinsville, this State, that you were never west of Pittsburgh."

"Josiah Lester?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?" demanded Louise.

"The brother of the man who adopted you from the poor-house."

Louise arose with haughty mien.

"This is heaping insult upon insult!" she cried. "I did not hire you to come here and insult me, sir. You can go, and don't you dare to come here again. Do you understand?"

And she stamped her foot imperiously.

"I am not deaf!" Dick replied, rising, "and when I find him, I shall most likely be able to find you a home where it won't cost you a cent to live. The State Hotel would be glad to accommodate one so young and charming. It yearly accommodates hundreds. Good-day, Miss Breck!"

And Dick turned and left the room and the hotel, now more than ever satisfied as to the guilt of Louise.

After leaving the hotel, he steered for Ricketts's saloon on the Bowery, hoping to get on the track of Bill Breck there again.

Breck was not there, however, but in his place Dick found a substitute, in the person who had accompanied Breck to Circe's.

He was about "half seas over," and spouting about the battles he had won in Old England.

By the crowd he was addressed as English Jack.

Dick ordered a drink, and asked the gang if they would have a "smile," and, unnecessary to add, all "smiled."

Then Dick called English one side.

"Say, my friend," he said, "are you working at anything?"

"No."

"Do you want to make a stake?"

"No one needs to worse than me. Ef I don't raise the wind by to-morrow, I'll have no place to eat or sleep."

"Then come with me, and maybe we can make a bargain."

Dick led the way to the Atlantic Garden, where they became seated.

The orchestra was playing, but not many were present.

Ordering some beer, Dick began:

"Now, my friend, will you be kind enough to tell me your name?"

"It is Jack Moore, otherwise English Jack."

"You come from London, eh?"

"No, from Liverpool."

"Do you know Bill Breck, the tough?"

"I reckon I do, and I don't know any good of 'im, either. I'm a purty bloody tough, myself, but I can't hold a patch to him."

"Yet I saw you in his company, a couple of days ago."

"Yes, I know. He got so full he couldn't go home, himself, so I went with him."

"If I'm any judge, you were about as full as he was."

"Not quite. I knew enough to navigate, and so took him home."

"Does Breck live at Circe's?"

"He's got a room on the top floor."

"Does he rent it from Circe?"

"No—from the landlord."

"Do you know Frank Lester?"

"No."

"Have you heard Breck mention him?"

"I believe I have. But, what the bloody dickens aire ye askin' all these questions for?"

"Because I want you to find Frank Lester. Breck knows where he is, and you are to pump him. There is money in it for you, if you succeed."

"How much?"

"A hundred dollars—maybe more."

"That ain't enough."

"It is all I can promise, at present, and that, even, comes out of my own pocket, with no prospects of getting a cent of it back."

English Jack regarded Dick with some curiosity.

"You are a detective, then?"

"Yes."

"You want to find Frank Lester?"

"I do."

"Isn't it worth more than a hundred?"

"You find him, first. You will be fairly dealt with."

"You want me to shadow Breck?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do: Give me ten dollars down, and I'm your man."

"I don't know about that."

"Suit yourself. I can't go around Breck's haunts without money, as you must know."

"True. I will give it to you."

"And he did."

"Now go, and don't leave Breck's trail for a moment, until you can bring me some news."

"Neither I will. I'll let you know at what place?"

"The Morton House. Inquire for Richard M. Bristol."

"O. K."

And English Jack departed on his mission.

CHAPTER X.

JOSIAH IN HARD LUCK.

HAVING disposed of English Jack for the time being, Dick had nothing to do but wait.

He could make no arrest on the little information thus far acquired, and there was no present prospect of his getting any more, except through Jack or Fred Ferris.

Thus, in idleness and waiting, several days passed.

Dick had visited Ricketts's a number of

times, but without any definite result; neither Jack nor Bill Breck was there.

"Fire me, if this ain't provoking! I reckon on the likeliest thing I can do is to pack up and go back West."

This was the conclusion Dick had arrived at when Josiah hove to on the horizon of the Morton House.

Josiah evidently had forgotten his Sunday School class at Perkinsville.

He was all "broke up," evidently, for, approaching Dick, he whispered:

"I'm bu'sted. Can you stand a shout?"

"Certainly!" and they proceeded to the bar.

"Been to see Circe, eh?" queried Dick, when they had returned to the office.

"No. I've been knockin' around town, seein' the sights, till the last cent is gone. How in thunder I'm goin' to git back to Perkinsville I don't know."

"Why don't you send for money?"

"D'ye suppose Samantha would send me any money? She'd see me in Halifax, first."

"Why don't you go to Circe, then?"

"Hang her! She's got all my money already. Ef I hadn't been a consarned idiot I'd hev stayed at home in Perkinsville, where honest folks live."

Josiah was in a bad fix.

"If I go home broke," he went on, "my old woman will pull every hair out of my head, and I ain't got none to spare."

"Well, you can buy a wig. That will answer as a substitute."

"Not much. But the beauty of the question is, how am I to get home?"

"Well, walking is good."

"Not good enough for a man like me. I'm too old for that. I thought maybe you would help me out."

"Well, I'll think it over."

"But what am I going to do while you are thinking it over?"

"Give it up. Maybe you can find some work, if you hustle."

"At what?"

"Cleaning the streets."

Josiah groaned.

"Never!" he said. "D'ye think I'd stoop so low as that—me, Josiah Lester, of Perkinsville?"

"I don't know as there is any disgrace in honest work. But I'll see that you don't starve. When you really want to go back home I will pay your way. Bnt you had better remain here until we find your nephew."

"The Lord only knows when that will be," replied Josiah, despondingly.

"Well, of course we can't tell, but I am in hopes it won't be long before we get some news of him."

"I reckon he's dead!"

"It may be. But if he sold his policies, no one has yet turned them in to the insurance companies."

"Which they would be likely to, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, if they were sure he was dead."

"Do you still suspect Louise?"

"Yes, more than ever."

"Hev ye found out anything more conclusive against her?"

"I have found out that Bill Breck visits her nearly every day."

"You don't say!"

"Yes. I visited her and told her of it, but she indignantly denied it. She disclaimed all knowledge of any such a person, and ordered me out of her room."

"The deuce she did! You can just settle your mind on one thing."

"What is that?"

"If Breck goes to see Louise, she knows he is her father."

"No doubt of it."

"And, knowing that, it does begin to look as if there was some sort of conspiracy, for Bill Breck is about as mean a rascal as you kin find."

"I've no doubt of that, either. The very looks of him is enough to send him up to Sing Sing."

"He's a tough customer, no mistake. Where did you run across him?"

"Down on the Bowery."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Yes. I treated him. I've got a man on his track, and if anything conclusive can be found out against him, why, I'll nail him."

"Bully for you!"

Dick made arrangements for Josiah to remain at the hotel for a few days longer, which pleased the old man hugely.

CHAPTER XI.

THAT LETTER.

THE next day, Dick called around at the office of the two companies where Frank Lester had got insured.

At the Prudential nothing was to be learned.

"We will seize and hold the policy, as soon as it is presented," said the vice-president. "We heartily commend your efforts to find Lester, and hope you will succeed in ascertaining whether or not he has met with foul play. We shall not honor the policy, until we find out what has become of him."

"Do not, and immediately the policy is presented, detain the party who presents it, until you can send for me."

"We will."

At the Manhattan office nothing was to be learned, except that an anonymous letter had been received, announcing the death of Frank Lester, at Laredo, Texas.

The letter bore no postal marks, and was unsigned.

"Do you take any stock in it?" asked our hero.

"No, not the least. If there was any truth in it, why should there not be a signature?"

"True. Can I see the letter?"

"Certainly."

And the clerk produced it.

It was in a feminine style of handwriting, and without place of sending, although dated two days before, and read as follows:

"Frank Lester lies dead, in Laredo, Texas, of typhoid fever. The policies will be presented by his heir's attorney, for collection, after a reasonable period."

"This would seem to indicate that they will not be presented direct, by Louise," Dick remarked.

"No. If there has been any foul play, she will disguise her hand in it as much as possible. The policy, when it arrives, will most likely be presented by a confederate of hers, who will endeavor to establish the fact that he bought the policy from Lester, and that Lester is really dead, as reported."

"Suppose this is proven?"

"Then we have thirty days in which to hold the matter under consideration."

"And then—?"

"We shall have to honor the claim."

"Will you write to Laredo?"

"Certainly. We have an agent at San Antonio, and he will be instructed to visit Laredo, and find out the full particulars. As there are ten thousand dollars at stake, we shall leave no stone unturned to investigate this."

"Glad to hear that," Dick declared, "and I will aid you all I can, you can rest assured."

"Do so, Mr. Bristol. We shall certainly be glad of your assistance, and I can vouch that the company will see you well paid for your services. We will notify you by messenger as soon as there are any new developments in the case."

"Very well. Have you a copying press?"

"We have."

"Then please give me a copy of this letter. I wish to try an experiment."

"Certainly, with pleasure. Here!"—and

the gentleman called to his clerk. "Have a copy made of this at once."

In a few minutes Dick was in possession of the desired copy.

He then left the insurance office, and went back to the hotel, and to his room.

"Now, Miss Louise, I'll put you to the test," he muttered.

He produced some writing materials from his trunk, and indited the following, in a rude, scrawling hand:

"LOUISE:—Where can I see ye at once, without coming to the hotel? I'm watched. Send written answer by messenger."

"BILL BRECK."

Dick then called a messenger, and sent him with the note, with directions to bring back an answer.

"Maybe it won't work," Dick muttered, "but I think it will."

The messenger was gone about an hour; when he returned to the hotel he handed Dick a sealed envelope.

Before opening it, Dick questioned the boy.

"Did you see the lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did she say when she opened the envelope and read the message?"

"She didn't say nothin', but set down at a table and wrote a reply. Then she gave me a quarter, and I came away."

Dick opened the envelope and spread the note out on the table.

It was written on scented paper, and couched in the following language:

"MR. R. M. BRISTOL:—Your decoy letter received. If you expect to entrap me into any scheme, you will get left. I am no fool, nor will I pay any further attention to any of your actions. And if you annoy me any more I will have you placed under arrest. Bear this in mind, and save yourself trouble."

"LOUISE LESTER."

Dick was not greatly surprised. He had expected some such an answer as this. He had not calculated upon meeting Louise when he wrote to her; it was only to get a specimen of her chirography, and now he had got it!

He compared the two letters.

The chirography identically corresponded with that of the note to the insurance company.

There was now no longer any doubt, in Dick's active mind, as to the guilt of Louise. This letter alone was enough to convict her in his estimation.

It now remained for him to hear from English Jack and Fred Ferris before making an arrest, or more than one, as the case might be. The prospect of receiving any pay for his outlay and his services, from Louise, were of course now too distant to admit of any consideration.

The same might be said of Frank Lester, in case he was found, for, if he had run through with his fortune, he was not now likely to have any money to reward any one.

The only hope, therefore, that Dick had for getting his money out of this venture, was from the insurance companies.

If Frank Lester was found alive, they probably would not have to disburse ten thousand each for years to come, and the interest that would accumulate on these amounts, in the mean time, would be so enormous that they could well afford to reward Dick handsomely.

So, at least, he reasoned.

Fred Ferris was the first to put in an appearance, from the "trail," and that was not until two days later. He looked pretty well famished, and all his polish and flashiness seemed to have vanished.

So they adjourned to the dining-room, where, over a sumptuous repast and a bottle of wine, they discussed the situation.

"Well, I suppose you have lots of news?" Dick observed.

"Not much. I found out where Larrezo lives, No. — Mulberry street. He runs a little one-horse grocery store. I have kep

a strict and vigilant watch, but there has been no more meetings between Larrezo and Bill Breck, nor has the Italian been away from his store since I saw you last. He has a pretty fair Italian reputation among his countrymen, and if either of the men are guilty, you can depend upon it that it ain't Larrezo."

"Well, we can tell better about that when my other emissary comes in."

"Who is he?"

"English Jack."

"That cut-throat? Why, he is the right hand pal of Bill Breck!"

"He evidently don't think much of his pal."

"Don't you believe it! Breck can twst him around his thumb."

"All the same I think that English Jack will bring a good report!"

"If you depend upon him, you can excuse me, sir. I have served you well, but I can not serve a man who will employ a ruffian like this chap."

"You are at perfect liberty to suit your own convenience. If you are tired of your job after the money I have paid you, you will know what to do. I am not the man to dilly-dally with any one. When I say a thing, I mean it."

"Very well. I will thank you for nothing, as I have earned all I have received."

"You may receive less than you think, and again, you may receive more. However, your resignation is accepted, in preference to that of English Jack."

Although Ferris did not like this, he arose from the table with his meal half finished, and left the room.

He had hardly disappeared when English Jack entered, evidently searching for his employer.

Sighting Deadwood Dick he at once advanced to him.

"Say," he said. "Wasn't that Frank Lester a sort of a sport?"

"Yes."

"Did he know a man named Ferris?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Have you seen Ferris?"

"Oh, yes; he's looking after another portion of this insurance case for me."

"Well, you can bet your boots on one thing!"

"What is that?"

"Ferris is playing you for a sucker. He has not been looking up any clews, at all. I s'pose you don't know that he and Louise are pretty thick together, and that he has been spending the most of his time in her company?"

"No, I was not aware of any such thing."

"Such is the fact," averred Jack.

"I even saw them out carriage-riding together to-day."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. They had a barouche, with liveried driver and footman!"

Dick uttered a whistle of surprise.

"Well, here is a go!" he said. "It looks as if he too was in this conspiracy."

"You are right. If Fred Ferris is engaged to Louise, as I reckon he is, you can bet he has got a hand in the plot."

"No doubt of it, now, I think. I shall, therefore, take to watching him myself, and will give you Bill Breck to look up. And when you do find him, keep him under your constant surveillance, until you report again to me!"

"Very good. I will do so. I know all his resorts and it won't take me long to find him."

So English Jack once more took his departure.

Early the next day Dick set out on his mission to shadow his shadow—Ferris.

Dick having formed a lasting impression against Louise, it was not so hard for him to believe in Ferris's guilty complicity in her schemes.

If the trio were in the conspiracy, then it ought not to be difficult to get tidings of Frank Lester through one of them.

CHAPTER XII.

SUSPICIONS.

WHEN he reached the Murray Hill Hotel Dick sought the head clerk, with whom he had conversed on his first call. He was a pleasant, accommodating man, and Dick did not hesitate to approach him.

"Are you well acquainted with Mr. Fred Ferris, sir?" Dick inquired.

"No, not well acquainted, although I have seen the gentleman frequently."

"Have you seen him around the hotel very recently, do you remember?"

"No, not since yesterday."

"Does he call here often?"

"Yes, almost every day."

"Do you happen to know whom he comes to call upon?"

"Miss Lester, I presume, as they occasionally go out riding."

This was evidence enough to satisfy Dick that English Jack was right: Fred Ferris was a traitor, and a colleague of Louise!

Dick did not attempt to call upon the latter. He wanted to see Ferris, first.

But, whether purposely or not, Ferris did not show himself, so Dick waited all day, till dark, and then, disgusted, he went back to the Morton House.

Here, contrary to his expectations, he found Ferris engaged in a game of billiards.

"Why, hello!" he exclaimed, as he ran the game out on his opponent. "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you, all day."

"I've been searching or rather waiting to meet a traitor," replied Dick, with sarcasm—"a traitor, by the name Ferris."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Have you found Bill Breck, yet?"

"No; he's not to be found anywhere in the city."

"I presume it would be hard for you to find him when you have not been looking for him, Mr. Ferris."

"I do not know what you mean. Of course I have been looking for him."

"Of course you have not. Serving Louise, and taking her carriage riding is not what I supplied you with money for. You have not been looking for Breck, at all, for it is more than likely that you know where he is, and what has become of Frank Lester."

"This is infamously false."

"It is true."

"Who has been stuffing you up with such a pack of lies?"

"My informant, sir, was the hotel clerk."

"Then, he is a liar, too."

"Do you deny having been to the hotel?"

"No. I have been there several times in hope of running across Breck."

"Do you deny calling upon Louise?"

"I do. Haven't even caught a glimpse of her."

"You deny, also, then, that any of these charges are true?"

"Ay! ay! But listen: I swear upon my word of honor, as a gentleman, that the following charges are not true: First, that I have not been searching for Bill Breck; second, that I know where he is; third, that I ever had anything to do with him or Louise; fourth, that I saw, or had anything to do with Louise during my visit to the hotel; and fifth, that I have been in a conveyance of any kind, with Louise, I swear that these charges are unjust and infamous lies, who ever uttered them. Some one evidently has been trying to blackcap me."

"Are you willing to go before the clerk of Murray Hill, and swear that you had not called upon Louise?"

"Yes, I am!"

"And that you never had her out carriage-riding?"

"I'd swear to it, before a justice of the peace."

"Then we will start at once."

"You are foolish!"

"How so?"

"Because day-clerks in all the big hotels go off duty at six o'clock. It is now eight. You would not stand one chance out of ten of finding your interesting informant."

"I have more than one."

"What's the name of the other?"

"I refuse to disclose his name."

"Well, it is my right to demand to know!"

"Why so?"

"Because you have preferred grave charges against me, which would ruin my social standing and good name."

"Cannot help that. You have been seen in the company of one who is to be arrested by me, on a serious charge, and it is my duty to arrest you as her confederate on the charge of abduction, with possible murder. This, as a United States criminal detective, I am enabled to do. Are you aware of this fact?"

"I know nothing about it. If I am arrested, it will be a dear job for you, let me tell you."

"Bah! Now, see here! On conditions, I can save you from immediate arrest and incarceration."

"What are those conditions?"

"Promise me that you will remain on the inside of this hotel—not venturing outside—until you are wanted by me, and you will not be molested, and no one will be the wiser for what has passed between us. Do this, and you may pass some time yet without exposure or arraignment!"

"I promise, faithfully!"

"Remember! the hotel detective, and an aide will watch you, and any attempt on your part to escape, will result in your arrest. In the mean time you will have a chance of meditating on the advisability of turning State's evidence!"

"Do not fear!" replied Ferris. "If I am under the ban of unjust suspicion, I shall not attempt to escape, and thus confirm the suspicion. I am much obliged to you for your leniency, under existing circumstances. As for turning States evidence. I cannot very well turn, when I have nothing to divulge!"

"Oh, you can't fool me. You know more of this case than you care to acknowledge. I'll give a winning horse on that. If you want to save your bacon, you will expose the whole fraud, for the whole three of you will be convicted on what evidence I have already secured."

"What evidence is that?"

"Time enough to learn that when you stand before the bar of justice. Good-night. Keep your promise to remain here and you will not be molested."

"I will remain here. When you have gone deeper into the matter, you will be prepared to exonerate me."

"I hope so. Good-night!"

"Good-night."

Then they separated, Dick going in quest of the hotel detective, whom he soon found wandering about the building, apparently aimlessly but with an eye to everything and on everybody.

Dick had already formed his acquaintance, so there was no need of introduction.

"Hello, Fleming," saluted Dick, as, professionally they shook hands. "What's the news? Anything doing?"

"Nothing unusual. In fact things are very quiet."

"Well, I've something to keep one's blood from stagnating. You know Fred Ferris?"

"I reckon I do."

"Well, I want you to get an assistant, and either you or he watch Ferris constantly, and arrest him if he tries to leave this hotel."

"What for?"

"I have him under surveillance for participation in a crime, which, at present, looks like a murder. I did not lock him up because he promised not to leave the hotel until he was wanted. If he attempts to escape, nail him, and send for me."

"All right; I'll do so. He knows better than to try and escape from me."

So Dick left his prize to Fleming's care, and went into the office.

He could practically do nothing more until he heard from English Jack.

He intended to leave Louise for the last arrest, and wished to give Ferris time to turn States evidence.

If Ferris did turn State's evidence, and gave away all the information he possessed, Dick felt sure he could close up the case. The only thing that annoyed him was the uncertainty hanging over the fate of Frank Lester.

Was he dead, or was he living?

He might not be fifty miles away, and alive and hearty.

In that case he might defend the prisoners, and Dick would be placed in an uncertain light, and unpleasant position.

On the other hand, if he should not be found, and no actual criminal proof could be established against the prisoners, they would go free, and Louise, if she held the policies, would get the fortune.

What would Dick get?

Nothing but trouble and the satisfaction of having made his first real detective failure.

This was the way the matter now seemed to stand.

But, only over one night.

Bright and early the next morning, English Jack put in an appearance and his very aspect betokened good news even before he had spoken.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEADWOOD DICK'S DROP.

DICK immediately seized him by the arm, and led him to the smoking-room, where, with good cigars he sat down for a conference.

"Now, then, fire away," said Dick, "and let me know what news you've got, for I'm anxious to know."

"Well," said Jack, taking a long puff at his weed, "I found Breck—caught him in the act of leaving the city, by railroad; so I left, also, but I didn't go in the same car."

"I watched him, however, through an end window."

"When he got off I got off, also. An old horse and buggy was waiting for him, driven by a lank countryman. Breck got in and was driven off into the country."

"The old horse could not go very fast, so I followed."

"A few miles away we sighted a piece of woodland."

"We left the main road there and crossed the plowed field, and entered a sort of wood road."

"We went to the center of the woods."

"Here is a cleared plot of ground, only meagerly cultivated, and an old stone house of the rambling sort, that may have been built during Revolutionary times, for it looks more like a fort than a dwelling, and is so well built that it would resist a strong attack."

"Into this building Breck went, while the countryman went in, too."

"Directly, four long-legged, raw-boned countrymen came out, and began to prowl around to see if there were any spies in the neighborhood."

"Finding none—for I had skinned up a tree—they went back into the house."

"There's more windows than anything else about the house, and I did not dare venture out into the clearing, for fear of discovery; so I waited and watched."

"By-and-by the old nag was hitched up again, Breck got into the buggy, and was driven back to the station. I never lost sight of him, detective."

"Good for you! What else?"

"Well, he went straight to Murray Hill Hotel, and was shown up stairs. Directly the porter brought down a bouncing big trunk, and "Louise Lester" was painted upon it. I didn't find out where it was going to, but I've got my opinion."

"To the old house?"

Jack nodded.

"You've hit it."

"You feel satisfied that Frank Lester is a prisoner in that house?"

"Am as good as positive of it."

"Then no time must be lost. We must start immediately to the rescue."

"You forget. We are not strong enough. There are six able-bodied men in that old house, if not more. What could we do in an open field against a fortified half-dozen? Not a darned thing! They'd mow us down in no time."

"Oh! we should have to use strategy. But, even then we must have more men. I shall start at once for the vicinity of this old house!"

"What for?"

"To arrange my campaign."

"I see. And how about me?"

"You? Well, listen! I judge you are acquainted with some of the gamiest fighting men on the east side of New York—men, who, though not Sullivans, would fight with any kind of weapons, upon an offer of fifty dollars per head."

"I'm just the boy as kin do it—boys who are stayers on a case like this and will obey a leader."

"The very ones I want. I want no police aid in this business. Pick out ten of the flowers of the flock, guarantee 'em fifty each, and follow me as soon as you can. When you get to the edge of the clearing, keep close under cover, and be sure not to be surprised. These men from the old house are liable, more now than ever, to be on duty, for I doubt not some spy has been put upon us."

"Perhaps. But I know the boys you will command, and they know me. From what I've read and heard of you, I'll bet we'll scoop in the hull caboodle. We'll be at the appointed place at one in the morning. Right?"

"Yes, that will do. Mind you don't attract any attention in passing through the station village, as I want no undue excitement, even after the arrest."

Dick at once began his preparations to depart for the old stone house, where Frank Lester was supposed to be confined.

He ascended to his room, put on a rough suit, and equipped himself with his revolvers, a bull's-eye lantern, a knife, matches, and whatever occurred to him would be essential in a campaign against the enemy.

He inferred from what English Jack had said, that the job ahead would not be an easy one, and it was best to go well "heeled."

So when the preparations were complete, and after re-cautiousing Fleming not to let Ferris escape from the hotel, he set out for the depot, and took the train for C. station.

Of course he did not know exactly where the old stone house was situated, but he could find out.

So when he arrived at C. he struck for the nearest saloon, and propounded his inquiries, after patronizing the bar and treating the proprietor.

"My friend," said Dick, "do you know of such a place as the old stone house, a few miles from here?"

"Yas."

"Can you direct me how to find the place?"

"Guess so."

"Well, I'll be much obliged if you would."

"You folter this street until it turns into a country road. Foller the road until you see a patch of oak, chestnut and pine forest to your right, but off from the main road some distance. It is a wood-path. Foller this, and it will take you to the old stone house, whose history none of our present generation seems to know. But, why do you want to go there?"

"For reasons of my own."

"You'd better look well out!"

"Why so?"

"Because old Trum Magee and his boys, who live there, are a tough gang, and so tough that they won't be tolerated anywhere else."

"What are they—cut-throats?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to have my guzzle at their command, if they knew I had any money about me!"

"How many is there of them?"

"Six boys and the old man."

"Are they fighters?"

"You bet! People as don't want to get broke up keep out of them woods. Are you really going to the stone house?"

"That is just what I propose, my friend."

"You won't come back alive."

"Never fear."

Dick then sought a livery-stable, hired a saddle-horse, and mounting, took the route given by the saloon-keeper, and dashed away at a lively gallop.

It savored of old times to be in the saddle once more. It seemed like old days in the West, when he spurred his steed over prairie and mountain, free as a bird from the restraint of "refined" civilization.

Leaving his horse in the woods, in a spot where he was not likely to be discovered, Dick stole forward and soon reached the edge of the clearing.

It was now dusk, but he was able to get a good view of the antiquated stone mansion.

It looked more like a small-sized citadel than anything else. All the masonry was massive. The windows were massive and the doors were ponderous.

"That place would withstand a siege," Dick mused. "Only strategy can ever get us in there, without official aid."

Not a light was visible from where Dick was stationed, and therefore he concluded that the dwelling portion of the place must be on the other or opposite side of the mansion.

So, having plenty of time before the arrival of English Jack and his crowd, Dick made an entire circuit of the premises, to discover that there were no lights in any of the windows. To all intents, the place was closed, as against a siege.

"They're there, just the same, and big are the odds they are on guard, ready to riddle the first man who appears."

Nevertheless, it took a Western man to discount these villains, for, within ten minutes, Dick's back rested against the east wall of this old gray stone house.

He had crept, snake-like, through the weeds, and, for the time being he was safe.

The windows were so placed, that, from his present position, he could not be reached by a bullet.

This position he held for an hour or more; then, satisfied that he had not been discovered, he made a circuit of the entire building, on a tour-of thorough reconnaissance near the building and along the edge of the clearing.

When he reached the east point of the woods he met with a surprise.

Seated on a stump was no less a man than Josiah Lester, whom he had last seen at the Morton House.

Josiah seemed as much surprised as Dick.

Dick's mind was made up in a moment; he did not bet on the man from Perkinsville.

"You have been playing detective, too, I presume?" he said.

"Rather!"

"What have you found out?"

"Breck, Louise, Larrezo, and them thievin' country Jakes are in that house."

"Let 'em stay there, too, until my emissary comes with the toughest part of New York. They will make short work of getting into that house."

"I shouldn't wonder."

Just then a peculiar whistle was heard. Dick listened.

There was a moment's silence, and, then, Josiah burst forth.

"Oh! What will Samantha say? Oh! all my money's gone, and them steers ain't bought yet! She'll give me particular thunder when I get back to Perkinsville."

"Look here, Josiah!" said Dick, "do you know what I think I'd better do with you?"

"What?"

"Put the handcuffs on you!"

"Oh! Lord!"

Before Josiah could realize it, the bracelets encircled his wrists.

Dick then tied his feet together, and propped him up against a tree.

"Now you stay there for awhile, Josiah, until more light is thrown on this matter. It rather hits me you know more about it than most people."

"O-o-oh! no! Lord knows I'm as in'cent as a suckin' calf."

"That's to be found out."

There was a tramp of many feet, and English Jack and his gang approached.

And such a gang!

Had not Dick implicit faith in the ex-sailor he would have been tempted to turn.

They were about the toughest party he had ever seen.

"Well, we're here!" answered Jack.

"What do you think of my dandies?"

"I reckon they will do," replied Dick.

"Do they understand the terms?"

"Just as well as I do."

"And are willing to fight?"

"Fight is their meat and grog."

"Very well, for, from what I have heard, we have got a lot of desperate men to tackle."

"No doubt of it."

"Are you all armed?"

"Yes—with revolvers."

"They are of but little use, in a battle against a stone wall."

"How do you propose to attack the shebang?"

"Invest all sides, at once. That is the only way we can gain entrance. It will require one of the smallest men in the party to gain entrance through one of those windows."

"I kin do 'em!" spoke up Bleecker-street Bob, just over from Blackwell's Island. "I've squeezed through tighter holes than them."

"Very well. Scatter, now, and the first one to get into the house, is to open the front door and admit the others. Not a shot is to be fired unless necessary!"

The night was nearly as light as day, the moon being at full, which of course made it all the more difficult to get near the old stone house; but all, at length, stood close in its shadow.

All the windows were tried, but they were not to be lifted.

The front door was next inspected, but that, too, was as firm as adamant, and would not have yielded to the persuasion of a battering-ram.

"Guess we're dished," said Jack.

"It looks so," replied Dick.

"How about the roof?" suggested one of the party.

"Well, there is no harm in inspecting that. Who is a good climber?"

"I am," replied English Jack. "It takes a sailor to do that, don't ye know."

A mass of climbing vines clung tenacious-

ly to the side of the house, and reached to the roof. So old and strong were they that they could bear a man's weight, and, in a jiffy English Jack was upon the roof, and out of sight. Dick and the crowd below waited in suspense for Jack's reappearance, but they waited in vain, for Jack came not.

A quarter of an hour passed—a half an hour passed, but still he came not.

"Something's wrong," decided Deadwood Dick to the crowd. "You fellows remain here, and if you do not see me inside of ten minutes, the whole lot of you come up to the roof, and investigate the matter."

"We will that," replied the gang, in a chorus. "We'll make it bloody warm for them as does yez any harm."

So Dick pulled off his coat and climbed to the roof.

The old mansion, although only two stories high, covered a good deal of ground; but, the roofs of the wings, although flat, were not on a level with the main portion of the building.

When Dick reached the roof, he gazed around him.

There appeared to be no skylights.

Evidently the house had been built before skylights came into fashion.

Nowhere, on any of the roofs, was English Jack to be seen.

The roof was of cemented stone slabs.

"Well, this beats the deck," Dick muttered. "What in blazes can have become of Jack? I see no way he could have got into the house from here, and the only way he could have got off the roof would be by the vines."

Suddenly an idea occurred to him.

The chimneys were of the old-time sort—big enough to admit of the passage of a man's body.

Had Jack descended one of these?

If so, why had he not opened the door?

Perhaps he was caged.

Perhaps there was an old-fashioned fireplace, by which he could escape.

The idea was plausible that he was a chimney prisoner.

Dick could imagine no other mishap.

After a careful inspection of the various chimneys, however, Dick came to the conclusion that if Jack had dropped down one of them, he was either instantly killed or had escaped into the house, and been made a prisoner.

Ten minutes had already expired, and the men from below began to mount to the roof, one by one.

"Well, what's der news?" asked Pat McCoy, one of the gang.

"I can't find Jack, nor any trace of him," Dick replied. "Neither can I find how he disappeared unless he slid down one of these chimneys."

"I'll bet he did! He used to be a chimney-sweep in London years ago. I used to work wid him."

"Well, if he's gone down—"

"I'll go after him," said McCoy. "Jack is a good boy, and I can lick the man as says he ain't."

"I'd advise you not to try it," said Dick. "In case you don't find an open fireplace, what aid can we give you? We have no tackle with which to fish you out again."

"Well, I'll take the chances. There must be a fireplace to the big chimney of the main building."

So, taking off his coat, McCoy mounted to the top of the big flue, and soon disappeared in its sooty depths.

CHAPTER XIV. A QUEER EXPLORATION.

WITH great anxiety the party waited for some report from below—from the lower regions, as it were. But they waited in vain.

The first gray streaks of dawn appeared in the East, and with them came a sudden and drenching rain.

There was no sign of life below.

If any one was in the house they took good care not to make any noise.

"I guess the only way," said one of the party, "is to git a big battering-ram, and hammer down one of the doors."

"I've a better idea than that," said Bleecker-street Bob.

"Well, what is it?"

"Has any one got any powder?"

"I have," said Carmine-street Jerry, who was equipped with an old-fashioned shotgun.

"How much have you got?"

"Half a pound."

"Give it to me."

"What do you want with it?"

"Never mind. Every man to the ground!"

The order was obeyed.

When the ground was reached, Jerry, who had recently finished a term for safe-blowing, advanced to the front door, accompanied by Bob, who was of the same noble fraternity, and had "done time" repeatedly.

After a careful inspection of the front door, Bob turned to the gang.

"It's no use," he said. "When that door was put up, it was ~~put~~ there to stay and don't you forget it."

"Well, we can try," said Jerry. "If the door kin be blowed up, hyer's the boy as can do it."

Thus far Deadwood Dick had made no objections to their movements but now he came to the front.

"This explosive racket will do, after a fashion," he said, "but other tactics must also be pursued. I will go back to the roof, and also drop down the chimney at the instant you are prepared to fire the blast. In this way we will be attacking them from two quarters at once. See the idea?"

"Yes, and it's a good one," said Bleecker-street Bob. "How shall we communicate with you, when we get ready to touch off the blast?"

"Oh! simply whistle."

"All right. Sail ahead. We'll be ready for you in five minutes."

So Dick ascended to the roof again.

Day had now fully dawned but the rain still came down in torrents.

Dick applied his ear to the mouth of the chimney, and listened, but there was no sound of any stir below.

This made it more than probable that Jack and McCoy were prisoners.

With considerable impatience Dick awaited the signal for the drop.

Estimating the distance, he presumed he would have a slide of about eighteen feet, as the house was an old-fashioned one, with high ceilings.

At last the signal came.

It was a long, low whistle, but distinctly heard from Dick's position.

So he at once took a drop down the big flue.

Simultaneously there was a loud report.

Dick had only partly anticipated his fall, for, instead of stopping in an open fireplace, as he had expected, he continued to go down, and eventually brought up in a place of inky blackness, which he calculated must be the cellar.

It was fortunate that he had taken his dark-lantern with him, for it now came in handy.

He had plenty of matches, and, lighting the lantern, he gave the cellar an inspection.

There was nothing to be discovered, however, except that an old ladder led to a trapdoor above. This ladder he at once ascended, but only to discover that the door was fastened above.

With all his might Dick tried to lift the trap, but his efforts were fruitless.

The trap was fastened so securely that it would have taken a derrick to lift it. Another inspection of the cellar followed, in

hopes of finding some tool with which to force the trap; but nothing of the kind was discovered.

And he was in a dangerous position, too, for there was no window to the cellar, and the air was disgustingly musty and stifling.

A person could not long survive there.

There was no sound above, to indicate that the outside attacking-party had yet gained entrance.

"Well, this looks like I had got myself into a bad fix," Dick muttered. "But, courage, my boy! You wouldn't be yourself if you didn't manage to get out of it somehow."

And he was right.

If any one could get out of a tight corner, it was Dick.

And after rummaging around the cellar for some time, he at last found the way.

The discovery was somewhat unique. The walls of the cellar were built of stone, quarried out on blocks about a foot long by half a foot broad and thick—something like one of those used for city pavements of to-day.

One of these blocks attracted Dick's attention. Instead of being on a uniform surface with the other blocks, this particular one protruded into the rooms several inches.

To a less keen-eyed man than Deadwood Dick this fact would not have become immediately apparent, but it struck him as being rather odd, to say the least.

So he grabbed hold of the stone, and gave it a jerk, when, sure enough, out came the block.

"Aha! I'm on the right track now," he muttered. "There's two cellars under this house."

This proved to be the case.

In olden times the old Dutchmen used to have a special cellar for their wines and liquors.

This was evidently one of the old farm-houses of the Rip Van Winkle period.

The stone removed, Dick peered through the aperture.

All was blank darkness; not a ray of light to be seen.

Dick flashed his lantern inside, but the light did not penetrate far enough to disclose anything.

As far as was to be distinguished, one cellar was about the same as the other.

But, Dick was not satisfied.

"Loose stones have a significance," he argued, "and that stone was not loose without a reason. I am going to know that reason."

With that he set to work.

The stones really were put together with red clay mortar. With his good knife, Dick was able to dig this out of the crevices and thus to remove the stones one by one.

In ten minutes' time, he had made an opening sufficient to admit of his ingress into the next cellar.

So he went.

From this cellar, a staircase ascended, instead of a ladder, as in the other one.

Otherwise, there was nothing to be discovered.

Dick mounted this staircase, and tried the door.

Good luck, this time!

It was unlocked.

With caution he opened it.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

SIMULTANEOUSLY with Dick's opening of the door there came another crash on the outside of the building.

"I reckon that the door is about as strong as the powder," thought Dick, as he stepped upon the first floor of the house.

The room he entered was unfurnished and dusty, with cobwebs clinging to the ceiling. It had but one door, and this opened into a

hallway, from whence a staircase ascended to the next floor.

Judging that there would be no use of searching for Frank Lester on the first floor, Dick concluded to try the second, and therefore stole out into the hall.

A glance down the hall disclosed a half-dozen people on the inside of the front door, which had not yet yielded to the persuasion of the powder.

Each man was armed with a revolver, and stood in readiness to give the attacking party a warm reception immediately they gained entrance.

There was no earthly use of Dick's trying to attack them single-handed, so, watching his opportunity, he stole up the stairs.

If Frank Lester was a prisoner in this house, it was more than probable that he was on the top floor, since he was not in the cellar.

The first room he entered was the same as the one below—dusty and unfurnished.

From this a door opened into another apartment, but in this case the door was locked.

Dick tried it several times, but it did not yield.

He was about throwing himself against it for the purpose of bursting it open, when he was seized from behind and thrown to the floor.

He was on his feet in a moment, however, to be clinched in a bear's embrace, with no less a personage than Bill Breck!

Neither man uttered a word.

It was a struggle for the mastery, the best man to win.

Each knew what was to be expected of him, and what he might expect if he failed.

There could be no gainsaying the fact that Dick was overmatched, for Breck was physically his superior in every respect.

Moreover, he had the advantage of the surprise on his side.

It did him no good, however, for Dick broke from his grasp, re-clinched with him, and, a second later, had him upon the floor on his back.

To snap the self-locking handcuffs around his wrists was but the work of a second, and, before Breck could give utterance to a sound, his mouth was filled with a good-sized handkerchief.

Dick then dragged him into another room where any possible outcries of his could not be heard.

Then, removing the gag from the ruffian's mouth, he began his inquisition.

"Breck," he said, "how do you feel?"

"Curse you!" was the grim response.

"Oh! there is no need of that. I can get along without it. How would you like to go back to Sing Sing?"

"Not very much."

"But, that is where you're bound, unless you come to terms."

"What sort of terms?"

"Where is Frank Lester, where is your daughter, where is English Jack and Pete McCoy, and where are those insurance policies? Out with it now! You know what I mean!"

Bill Breck knew. Sing Sing no longer had any charms for him. He became as agreeable as a pet cat.

"If I answer your questions, do I go free?" he demurred.

"Well, for all I know. Answer truthfully, and I will not press any charge against you, unless I find you are doing an act of treachery."

"I'll do it," asserted Breck. "What do you want to know?"

"Is Frank Lester in this house?"

"He is."

"Held as a prisoner, I presume?"

"Yes."

"Where is Louise?"

Breck laughed.

"Out of your power. By this time she is on her way to New Orleans."

"Who made up this plot?"

"Old Lester and my daughter. I am ashamed to say it, but, although I am a jailbird, I guess my girl can beat me."

"Who bought those policies?"

"You don't expect me to know?"

"I do."

"Well, I didn't buy them but I got them all the same."

"And sold them?"

"I did; turned the mover to old Josh, for a consideration."

"I thought as much. Has he got them now?"

"I don't know."

"You do know!"

"My word of honor, I do not. If old Lester has not got them, I rather think Ferris has them to negotiate, after proofs of Frank's death. It was he and Louise, and the old man who planned the whole scheme. My only direct connection with the case, was to assist in the abduction, for which I was to receive a portion of the boodle when it was secured. I was drawn into the plot by the persuasions of Louise, and forced into it by Fred Ferris who had me in his power to that extent that he could have me sent back to prison."

"Where is Frank Lester imprisoned?"

"Release me, and I will show you."

"Promise to make no attempt to escape, and I will."

"I promise."

"Upon your honor?"

"On my honor."

So Dick at once released him.

"Now come this way," said Breck, "and come careful, for if the gang at the front door discovers us, the jig is up for sure. The old man and his sons have been paid to hold Frank a prisoner. He and his boys are a tough gang, and would not hesitate to kill a man for a very small monetary consideration."

"All right. Lead on."

Breck took a key from his pocket and unlocked a door leading into the next room, which they entered.

This room was also unfurnished.

There was a door communicating with another room.

Breck handed the key to this to Deadwood Dick.

"You can go in," he said. "I'll take a quiet sneak."

"What for?"

"Because I don't want to meet Lester."

"You are afraid of him, eh?"

"No, but I'd rather not meet him."

"Well, go ahead."

Breck did not wait for the second invitation, but immediately hurried away, evidently glad enough to get off so easily.

Dick then unlocked the door, and entered the next apartment.

It was inky dark until he turned on his light.

This room was furnished with a cot bedstead and mattress, a wash-stand and an old cook-stove.

Two men were reclining upon the bed, fast asleep.

One of them was English Jack.

The other was a tall, gracefully-built young man of about Dick's own age, with light curling hair and mustache.

The room was close to suffocation, there being no window to the place to give it ventilation.

"Hello, there!" cried Dick. "Are you fellows dead, or are you asleep?"

Both men sat up with a start.

But it was several seconds ere they could accustom their eyes to the light, so they could make out who their rescuer was. Finally the Englishman leaped to his feet with a glad cry.

"Deadwood Dick!" he ejaculated. . .

"At your service."

"And you have come to rescue us?"

"That is the order."

"Well, you came in the nick of time!"

"How so?"

"The farmer threatened to kill us between now and daybreak, unless we signed a paper."

"What sort of a paper?"

"One exonerating him from all blame. They caught both me and Pat as we dropped down the chimney. I was run in here for safe-keeping, and Pat is gagged and held prisoner in another room."

"So I suspected; hence I dropped down another chimney in search of you!"

"Bully for you! You are a trump, Mister Dick. But where are the boys?"

"They are attacking the front door now. I reckon it is a little strong for them."

"Who's got charge of the party?"

"Bleecker-street Bob."

"Then you can be he will bu'st in, for there ain't no door as can long resist him."

"Is this Mr. Lester?"

"Yes, I am Frank Lester," replied the young man.

"Who all were in this conspiracy against you?"

"My uncle, Josiah Lester, was the originator of the scheme, I understand; but my foster-sister, Louise, was the one who put it into execution. In this she was aided and abetted by her father, Bill Breck and Fred Ferris, whom I had always counted upon as being my friend."

"But what caused Louise to send for me to investigate the matter of your disappearance?"

"To divert suspicion from herself, for my disappearance created a sensation at my club when it was known I had so much money on my life, and that the policies were in favor of Louise; so, to disguise her hand in the diabolical plot, Louise hit upon the expedient of hiring a detective, never supposing, I presume, that he would be able to ferret out the mystery, especially as she had chosen a Western man."

"Did you have a quarrel with Louise before your were incarcerated here?"

"No; she was, apparently, always solicitous for my welfare."

"Did you dispose of your insurance policies to satisfy gambling debts?"

"No. They are deposited with the Garfield Safe Deposit Company, corner of Twenty-third street and Sixth avenue."

"Then the story of their being in possession of Breck and old Josiah is untrue?"

"Yes; it was in order to get possession of them that I was decoyed here. Louise and old Josiah put their heads together, and figured it out that by establishing the fact that I was really dead, they could secure the insurance on my life, and keep me locked up here until they had time to carry out their scheme, and then to skip to parts unknown."

"Well, I am glad their little game is baffled."

"Old Lester and Ferris—what of them?"

"Both are prisoners."

"And Louise?"

"She has fled the city, as Breck informs me."

"Where to?"

"Gone south, he says—bound for New Orleans. Will you pursue her?"

"No. Let her go. I am only too glad to get rid of the treacherous viper," was the earnest reply.

Just then the report of firearms came from the front of the house.

"Our boys have gained entrance, I reckon," said Dick. "Let's off to the rescue!"

"I have no weapons," Lester announced.

"Here! Take one of my revolvers," and Dick handed him one. "Don't fire to kill unless forced to for self-protection."

"All right."

Then, with drawn weapons, they rushed from the room.

Out into the hall they went, and down the stairs.

But, when they reached the lower hall, all sounds of conflict had ceased.

The countryman and his lank sons had vanished, and Bleecker-street Bob and party held the hall.

"They fled like a pack of sheep," said Bob, "and we didn't see fit to foller 'em, as nothing was to be gained by it that we could see."

"Let us go," urged Lester. "They're not worth bothering with."

A search brought forth Pat McCoy, bound and gagged, and most happy to be released; then the entire party set out for the station, where they arrived in safety, taking Josiah Lester with them.

The old man protested his innocence, but it was no use; not one of the party took any stock in his claim to honesty.

Little more remains to be told.

On his arrival in New York Frank Lester proved that he was not as impecunious as had been represented, for he drew a large sum of money from the bank, then, handsomely rewarding his friend, the detective, he divided the remainder among the other members of the rescuing party.

After a brief trial Josiah Lester and Fred Ferris received well-deserved sentences.

Neither Louise nor Breck were again seen in New York up to the time Dick boarded a train for the far West.

As Frank Lester does not propose to prosecute, it is not probable that anything more will ever be heard of Louise or her felon father.

THE END.

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 229 Crimson Kate; or, The Cowboy's Triumph.
 237 Lone Star, the Cowboy Captain.
 245 Merle, the Middy; or, The Freelance Heir.
 250 The Midshipman Mutineer; or, Brandt, the Buccaneer.
 264 The Floating Feather; or, Merle Monte's Treasure Island.
 269 The Gold Ship; or, Merle, the Condemned.
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 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, Pearl, the Pirate's Bride.
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